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## PARIS, A WINTER FAIRY TALE

DOCUMENTATION, NONPOLITICS FRANKREICH, GILETS JAUNES, PARIS

Saturday night in Paris. It's cold, not freezing cold, but cold. Passers-by do their last shopping, friends meet in the bistro, eat a snack, afterwards they go to the cinema or to the bar. The usual life in the neighbourhood. From a small side street a stream flows, no rather a trickle of people. Some of them have put on yellow vests.

The kind of vests that, under other circumstances, have been lying around for years unused and seemingly pointless in some corner of the trunk of the car. Here and now their apparent uselessness has come to an end. Here and now they give identity and, more importantly, belonging. For those whose disgust with the ubiquitous arbitrariness and desolation is not limited to the bourgeois sophistication of a Houellebecq (French writer, *EIE*). From a transistor or is it a megaphone, who knows and what role does it play, Joe Dassin: Aux Champs-Élysées distorts. Some of the demonstrators, because these are the people who have touched these yellow vests, bob their heads to the beat of the music. This chanson of longing, of the promise of bright days marks both their fundamental desire for an easier life and the concrete vanishing point of today's march, which began in the early hours of the day and which has led them across the city. Despite the long march and the strains of the day, there is no fatigue, no shadow on their faces. No, it seems to be more confidence and trust in themselves and their cause that is reflected in their features. Some of them will still reach the Champs-Élysées today, others, hunted by the cops and attacked with tear gas and rubber bullets, will abandon their plan. But only for today and that's why it won't matter. They will be back on the streets next weekend. To take on all the hardships and strains, all the dangers again. Because their life, their everyday life is just the same, day after day. And because that is supposed to change, must.

If the French government had hoped that the holidays and winter would somehow get rid of this annoying movement of the Gilets Jaunes, yesterday's Saturday was a disappointment for them. Nationwide there were over one hundred thousand demonstrators taking part in the various protests, demonstrations and actions. And that was more than the last weekend of action before Christmas. Comrades from Paris had written in advance that this day was crucial. If it is not possible to get a massive mobilisation off the ground, the whole affair is in danger of fizzling out. It was also necessary to have a stronger presence in Paris itself, as only about 3000 people had taken part in the last day of action in Paris. It was also necessary to demonstrate again in the centre of the capital, not to allow oneself to be pushed into the outskirts. In order to achieve these goals, it was necessary to discuss with neighbours, friends, colleagues and comrades in the days before the 5th of January. To listen to their reservations

and concerns, to take them seriously, to persuade them under all circumstances to join the actions. And even if Paris is not the navel of the world, even if many Parisians might secretly think so, the media's attention is much higher here than with actions in other cities.

Anyone who followed yesterday's reporting on ActeVIII knows that this project of the comrades can be described as a success. From Al Jazeera to the Tagesschau, the reports about the protests and riots were prominently placed, and the French media presented a similar picture. But let's start all over again. In the morning, 2000 – 3000 people gathered on the Champs-Élysées, suspiciously eyed by the gendarmerie and the CRS. After some time the movement was leisurely, more and more demonstrators joined incessantly, many arriving from abroad. On the square about 10,000 people gathered in front of Paris City Hall. Superfluous and eloquent speeches were made. At some point the crowd started to move, a short collision with a cop unit, then it went on towards the government district. For the first time the cops had a restrained concept, largely confined themselves to blocking measures in the direction towards the National Assembly. Several times the demonstration came across such barriers, changed direction and finally reached the banks of the Seine. The National Assembly was almost within sight, but the problem was that all bridges over the Seine were occupied by the cops. Some breakthrough attempts were of a rather half-hearted nature, probably also because it was actually clear to everyone that it would not be possible to reach the National Assembly today. So while some of the demonstrators were still skirmishing with the cops at one of the bridges over the Seine, another part had already moved on and marched over the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Here some windows went to pieces, scooters and cars of carsharing enterprises went up in flames, barricades were erected from building barriers and city furniture. The special highlight of the day, however, was undoubtedly the intrusion into the ministry where Macron's government spokesman was staying at the time. Visibly shocked, he later reported to the media that "a group of 15 hooded people, apparently wildly determined, partly dressed in black, partly wearing a yellow vest, had broken open the massive gate with the help of a construction machine and thus entered the courtyard. There the group had damaged some vehicles, "he had been evacuated hastily with his staff". Anyway, at the end of the day the circle was closed and despite the massive presence of cops and the use of enormous amounts of tear gas, a not inconsiderable number of demonstrators again reached the Champs-Élysées and fought with the cops, the fights did not always go out to their advantage.

We come to the rest of France, which for many Parisians plays no real role in their perception, but this is where the Gilets Jaunes movement was born and this is where their fate will be decided. It is almost impossible to list all the places and cities where there were actions yesterday. An arbitrary selection. In Rennes, demonstrators broke the door to open the town hall and entered the building. In Dijon the Gilets Jaunes moved to the barracks of the gendarmerie, whereupon the remaining "stable guards" hectically shoot around with tear gas and rubber bullets. In Nantes there were clashes in front of the prefecture, for hours the city centre was covered by a cloud of tear gas. In Toulouse and Bordeaux, barricades were burning, clashes with the cops. In Caen, a small town of 100,000 inhabitants, the fights continued from the morning hours until late in the evening, with fires everywhere and the cops losing control. In Saint-Nazaire, devastation at the prefecture, attacks on cop territory. In Troyes, the train station was occupied and rail traffic paralysed, several motorways and major national roads were blocked for hours throughout France. Clashes also in Rouen, Lille, Beauvais, Montpellier...

What will happen next? Who knows? Movements have their own laws. Perhaps Macron will be able to divide the movement with further concessions and participation offers. The demand for a "référendum d'initiative citoyenne" (RIC), which has been increasingly raised in recent weeks at demonstrations and in the social media, could be a starting point for a split. The movement is very heterogeneous, and even though it has been possible to largely prevent the radical right from exerting any influence, and even if its obvious presence on the actions has been partially and concretely prevented, it is still not a movement without demands. The clever people of Commercy have therefore launched an initiative to prevent unlegitimated spokespersons from being able to establish themselves or the movement from dividing itself up by questions of content. Whether this will succeed must be doubted with all goodwill. In any case, the movement will be able to maintain itself at the level it has established this weekend for the time being. Perhaps there will also be emotionalising events, there have already been some deaths, most of them in traffic accidents, but in Marseille an 80-year-old woman was fatally injured by a tear gas cartridge on her head when she tried to close the window of her apartment on the fourth floor of her house. And with the brutality for which the French cops are known, not only further serious injuries but also deaths can occur at any time. This option has even been publicly set up by the French Minister of the Interior as a threat. Soon the schools will start again and the university starts again, actions of the pupils and students will again intervene in the social conflictuality. The winter fairy tale is not over yet.

***Edited machine translation by Enough is Enough***

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